

A DRAGON APPARENT

837 suitable girl, and was back with one by six-thirty. At seven the
588 bonzès came and performed a marriage ceremony which took half
an hour. At seven-thirty we opened a bottle of champagne and
drank to the health of the bride and bridegroom, and by eight
they were already in bed.'

548 The evening was rounded off by a routine visit to the local opium
den,¹ which, probably by design, was as decrepit and sinister as a
waxworks exhibit. We stayed only a few minutes in this green-lit,
melodramatic establishment, but it was clear that the unprofitable
puff at the pipe was not to be avoided. One had to make some show
of going to the devil.

000 I was lodged in the minor palace of the *Conseiller de la République*,
the senior French official in Northern Laos, a Monsieur Leveau.
The *Conseiller* was a man whose shyness and slight reserve of manner
failed to mask a quite extraordinary hospitality. He never, for
instance, issued a formal invitation to a meal, preferring with an
air of casual assumption to say something like: 'Of course, you'll
be dining at home tonight.' Monsieur Leveau was married to a
Laotian wife, to whom I was not presented, and the huge official
building always seemed strangely empty. We dined facing each
other across a darkly gleaming wasteland of ambassadorial table.
Sometimes a Laotian servant stole into the room carrying dishes;
trailing behind him the distant sounds of a domestic interior. These
were immediately sealed off by the closing of the door, leaving us to
the vault-like silences of the huge room. As we sat there the light
bulbs gave out in various parts of the room and were swiftly re-
365 placed. In Luang Prabang the electric current was switched on at
the same time as the water was turned off — at seven-thirty. But
the result was no more than a feeble striving of the filament, and
the lamp in my bedroom produced a light considerably less than
that of one candle. Monsieur Leveau partly got over this difficulty
by enormously over-running lamps intended for a much lower
voltage, but they did not last long.

¹ [at Luang Prabang. 286
-- Analyst]